U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Kataoka et al. (U.S. Pat. No. 6,040,760); rejected claim 5 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Kataoka et al. (U.S. Pat. No. 6,040,760) in view of Japan 9-240381 as applied to claim 1, and further in view of Sorscher (U.S. Pat. No. 4,807,292); and indicated claims 6-9 allowable if rewritten to overcome the applied rejections and to include all of the limitations of the base claims and any intervening claims.

In response, the specification is amended to correct the informalities cited by the Examiner. As to the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §112, ¶2nd, although the Applicants do not necessarily agree with the Examiner, claim 2 is amended to more clearly define the "space" within the audio rack as suggested by the Examiner. As to the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103(a), the Examiner's rejections are made moot by filing this continuation application. As specifically set forth in MPEP §706.02(l)(1), the mere filing of a continuing application on or after November 29, 1999 will serve to exclude commonly owned 35 U.S.C. §102(e) prior art that was applied, or could have been applied, in a rejection under 35 U.S.C. §103 in the parent application. Therefore, the reference of Kataoka et al. (U.S. Pat. No. 6,040,760) must be excluded from consideration in this continuation application.

The Applicants believe that the claims are now in condition for allowance and, therefore, request the timely allowance of the pending claims.

If there is any fee due in connection with the filing of this Preliminary Amendment, please charge the fee to our Deposit Account No. 06-0916.

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Respectfully submitted,

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Dated: September 28, 2001

By: _____
David W. Hill
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APPENDIX TO AMENDMENT OF SEPTEMBER 28, 2001

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Paragraph beginning at line 15 of page 1 and ending at line 28 of page 1:

Pieces of electrical equipment that have different functions often have diverse shapes and dimensions. For example, there are items such as a CD drive, which has a large width and small height, and cassette or MD (Mini Disc) drives, which have a small width but a large height. To accommodate such equipment, there are standards, such as DIN (Deutsch Industrie Norm), for the center cluster module storage area for this equipment, which set forth specifications for size and shape. In general, each of the storage locations is established to have the same size and shape. For this reason, when a CD drive is inserted, there is considerable wasted space in the width direction.

Paragraph beginning at line 27 of page 8 and ending at line 5 of page 9:

When the rails 67a and 67b [re] are slid into the guide grooves 65a and 65b so as to insert the electrical equipment 66 into the first storage location 62, the connector 50, which protrudes from the rear surface of the electrical equipment 66 automatically makes connection with the receiving connector 79. By means of this action, the electrical equipment 66 within the first storage location 62 is electrically connected to the control board 71 via the receiving connector 79 and the bus board 73.

Paragraph beginning at line 6 of page 9 and ending at line 14 of page 9:

In the same manner, when the rails 70a and 70b [re] are slid into the guide grooves 68a and 68b so as to insert the electrical equipment 69 into the second storage location 63, the connector 50, which protrudes form the rear surface of the electrical equipment 69 automatically makes connection with the receiving connector 80. By

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means of this action, the electrical equipment 69 within the second storage location 63 is electronically connected to the control board 71 via the receiving connector 80 and the bus board 73.

Paragraph beginning at line 15 of page 10 and ending at line 18 of page 10:

Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 [shows] show the cases in which, because the width size of the electrical equipment 81 is not suitable for the first storage location 62, a mounting stay (spacer) having a cavity 85 therein is mounted to the right side of the electrical equipment 81.

Paragraph beginning at line 19 of page 10 and ending at line 26 of page 10:

The total width size of the second width size of the electrical equipment 81 and the width size of the mounting stay 83 is established so as to be equal to the first width size. On the right side of the mounting stay 83 is formed a rail (a protrusion) 84a that mates with the guide groove 65a. By the rail 84a and the rail 70b on the left side of the electrical equipment 81 sliding in the guide grooves 65a and 65b, the electrical equipment 81 is guided into the [second] first storage location [63] 62.

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IN THE CLAIMS:

2. (Amended) An audio rack according to claim 1, further comprising:

a controller that is disposed in the [totality of] space at a side of the second storage location within the audio rack that is not occupied by the first and second storage locations; and

a connection unit, which makes an electrical connection between the first electrical equipment in the first storage location and the controller, and an electrical connection between the second electrical equipment in the second storage location and the controller, wherein

the controller controls the first and second electrical equipment via the connection unit.

5. (Amended) An audio rack according to claim 1, further comprising:

a first guide, which is provided on an inner surface of the first storage location, and which guides the insertion of the first electrical equipment into the first storage location, and also establishes the position of the first electrical equipment within the first storage location in the width direction and in the height direction; and

a second guide, which is provided on an inner surface of the second storage location, and which guides the insertion of the second electrical equipment into the second storage location, and also establishes the position of the second electrical equipment within the second storage location in the width direction and in the height direction.

6. (Amended) An audio rack according to claim 4, further comprising:

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a first guide, which is provided on an inner surface of the first storage location, and which slidably supports the first electrical equipment; and

a second guide, which is provided on an inner surface of the second storage location, and which slidably supports the second electrical equipment, wherein

the first guide guides the insertion of the first electrical equipment into the first storage location, and also establishes the position of the [second] first electrical equipment within the first storage location in the width direction and in the height direction,

the second guide guides the insertion of the second electrical equipment into the second storage location, and also establishes the position of the second electrical equipment within the second storage location in the width direction and the height direction,

the first connector and the second connector have substantially the same shape,

the distance in the width direction between one of the first guides and the first connector in the width direction is equal to the distance between one of the second guides on the same side thereof as the one guide of the first guides and the second connector, and

the distance in the height direction from the one first guide and the first connector can be made equal to the distance in the height direction from the one second guide and the second connector.

8. (Amended) An audio rack according to claim 6, further comprising:

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a spacer, which is removably fixed with respect to a third electrical equipment on either the right side or the left side thereof, the third electrical equipment having a width smaller than the width of the first storage location, wherein

when the third electrical equipment, which is provided with the spacer, is inserted into the first storage location, it is slidably supported by the one first guide, with the other first guide slidably supporting the spacer, and further wherein

with the action of inserting the third electrical equipment into the first storage location, an electrical connection is made between the first connector and [the] a connector of the third electrical equipment.